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ABSTRACT

The reason that Great Britain's Open University (OU) students elected to study D101, the Social Science Foundation Course, was studied to discover their aims, expectations, and attitudes to the Open University and the course. Attention is directed to the first interview conducted before the course started to assess student orientations to study, conceptions of learning, and understanding of key concepts taught in the course. Three main types of orientation were identified: vocational, academic, and personal. Personal orientation, which was the most obvious and prevalent orientation, was composed of (1) "compensation," whereby the student felt cheated of educational opportunities in the past and was using OU to prove he or she is capable of getting a degree, and (2) "broadening," whereby the student wished to widen horizons and develop interpersonal skills. In relation to vocational orientation, most of the students had no particular job in mind but were hoping that in some undefined way the degree would help them to get a job sometime in the future. Study at OU was seen as a means to an end and the interest in the course was therefore extrinsic. In regard to academic orientation, some students were intrinsically interested in the course because of the subject matter while others were fulfilling requirements. In comparing the orientations of OU students and students at Surrey University, the difference was the emphasis on personal orientation in OU students; academic orientation was the main feature of students' orientation at Surrey. Two examples are cited to illustrate how orientation is related to the way students approach studying. A list of interview questions is appended. (SW)

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THE ORIENTATIONS OF STUDENTS STUDYING THE SOCIAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION COURSE

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that conventional university students have different orientations to study and that these orientations affect how they study on a course.

This report describes the orientations of students studying the Social Science Foundation Course and compares them with the orientations of conventional university students.

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THE ORIENTATIONS OF STUDENTS STUDYING THE
SOCIAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION COURSE

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1. BACKGROUND

This paper reports a study in which students were asked how they came to be studying D101, the Social Science Foundation Course, in order to discover their aims, expectations and attitudes to the Open University and the course. This is called Orientation. A group of students taking D101 as their first O.U. course has been followed through their first year of university study by interviewing them on three occasions.

The first interviews, before the course started, related to students' orientations to study, their conceptions of learning and their understanding of key concepts taught in the course. The second interviews, conducted while students were studying Block 5 on "Work", related to their approaches to study. The third interview, at the end of the course, related again to students' orientations to the O.U., their conceptions of learning and their understanding of the same key concepts covered in the first interview. (The background to the work of the Study Methods Group is described in Morgan, Gibbs and Taylor, 1980a).

This paper describes the results of part of the first interviews on orientation.

A previous study of orientation was carried out for the O.U. by Goodyear (1975), but this study was exploratory in nature and involved students on many different courses and at different stages of their university career. It was also isolated, in that it did not attempt to link the findings with students' approach to learning. The present study of orientation of D101 students, however, is attempting to situate students' orientation in the particular context of D101 and to show how this is related to a students' approaches to study. (Approach to studying a particular block in the course was the subject of the second interview.) We also hope to show how far the students feel they were successful or unsuccessful in their aims and how far their expectations were met by the course (this is covered in the third interview). A study of orientation will give the background and context within which a student studies and help to make understandable the approach that he takes. So what do we mean by orientation?

2. WHAT IS ORIENTATION?

Orientation is defined as all those attitudes and aims that express the students' individual relationship with a course and the university. It is the collection of purposes which orientates the student to a course in a particular way. Orientation, unlike the concept of motivation, does not assume any psychological trait or state belonging to the student. It is a quality of the relationship between student and course rather than a quality inherent in the student. The analysis of orientation does not set out to type students, rather it sets out to identify and describe types of orientation and to show the implications these different types of orientation have for the approach a student takes to learning.

A study at Surrey University (Beaty, 1978)* set out to explore the idea of orientation by interviewing two groups of students on different courses and following them through their three and four year degree courses to see how orientations were developed and how they changed over their time at university. The two courses were The Hotel and Catering Administration Degree course which is a four year sandwich type degree course and the Philosophy, Psychology and Sociology degree course which is a three year degree taught jointly by three departments. The orientations found the, were descriptive of students studying these courses and not intended to be descriptions of university students in general.

Four main types of orientation were identified: Vocational which is to do with the concern to get future jobs; Academic, which is to do with continuing education; Personal which is to do with developing as a person, and Social which is to do with enjoying the freedom of university life. These main types had sub-groups which discriminated between intrinsic and extrinsic interest in the course. Intrinsic interest is where the student is interested in studying the course for its own sake. Extrinsic interest is where the student is interested in studying the course as a means to an end. The following table shows how these different orientations are linked with the different concerns that a student has while he studies the course.

* Liz Taylor (nee. Beaty) spent three years at Surrey University working on a study of student orientation towards a Ph.D. The thesis is expected to be completed in 1981. The work described here has not been reported previously in this form.

ORIENTATION	INTEREST	AIM	CONCERNS
VOCATIONAL	intrinsic	training	relevance of course to career
	extrinsic	qualification	recognition of worth of qualification
ACADEMIC	intrinsic	follow intellectual interest	room to choose work stimulating lectures
	extrinsic	educational advance	grades, academic progress
PERSONAL	intrinsic	self improvement	challenge, interesting material
	extrinsic	proof of capability	feedback passing course
SOCIAL	extrinsic	have a good time	facilities for sport and social activities

We will now look more closely at each of these main types of orientation.

2.1 Vocational orientation

One of the courses studied at Surrey was a degree course in Hotel and Catering Administration, and as might be expected many of the students studying the course were vocationally orientated. There was, however, a profound difference in the concerns of students according to whether they had taken the course in order to be trained as hotel managers or whether their aim was to get a qualification in order to get a job in the industry. The former were intrinsically interested in the content of the course and were critical of any parts of it which they thought were irrelevant to their future careers. They tended to place emphasis on the practical side of the course rather than the theoretical side and to like the industrial year best of all. Students whose aims were primarily to gain qualification however, were concerned mainly about passing the course and with how far industry recognised the value of the degree. They tried to find out about whether it made any difference to people in industry what grade of degree you were awarded (2i or 2ii etc.) and the result of their investigation affected the amount of effort they put into the course.

One of these students had 'discovered' that the grade was unimportant:

"I'm in for a third at the moment. I think I'm better than a third but I'm not all that bothered because I don't think our degree is recognised that much by industry. And so you could say that it is not that important. As long as I am getting a pass mark or reasonably above, then good - I'm not the sort of person to go all out to do the best I can. I go out to get a reasonable mark."

The orientation a student expresses helps to put into context his approach to the course. The above student for example did little beyond the minimum required by the assessment system. Given his aim - to get a degree in order to get a job in a brewery company, and his belief that the grade did not count, his approach to study i.e. amount of effort he is willing to make, is understandable.

This student said that he did extra work - beyond the requirements of the continuous assessment system:

"Only if my interest happens to be aroused."

Whereas a student who is interested in being trained as a result of the course shows intrinsic interest in the content of the course and is prepared to work much harder. One student whose father owned a hotel and who expected to work there when he graduated commented:

"I work quite hard and do everything because it's all relevant - it will all help later on."

2.2 Academic orientation

In a similar way to vocational orientation, academic orientation illuminates the way a student works on the course, not merely in terms of effort, but also in terms of the focus of that effort. A student who is academically orientated and intrinsically interested in the course is one whose aim is to follow his interest in particular subjects. Perhaps a subject loved at school is followed through to university level. These students tend to be much more concerned to follow up ideas of their own than in keeping doggedly to the syllabus. In many cases, the syllabus and especially the assessment system seem to hinder the students in this aim. One student, who was interested in following up his enthusiasm for sociology, which had been aroused through taking an A level at technical college, actually left the

social science course at Surrey after one year because he refused to work evenly on the three subjects involved - Philosophy, Psychology and Sociology. He was very well informed and advanced in his knowledge of sociology and was reading far beyond the requirements in this subject, but at the same time doing hardly any work at all on Psychology, which he disliked. This meant that he did not complete the required number of essays for this course and had to leave the university.

"I wanted to do sociology because - well you see the interesting thing about sociology is that a part of it is called the sociology of education and - in studying education I'd become more aware of it - in a more objective way - you start to see the place it has in our society - placing people in society. You see sociology isn't a nine to five study, it's a continual thing in your social life - you are being a sociologist.....".

"My attitude is both instrumental and interest because - you are assessed and so you've got to a certain amount of course work and eh - I copy as many essays as I can and I do the minimum amount of work in philosophy and psychology. And in sociology I just try to do as much reading as I can and then when I do write essays I always bring in much more -- but I hardly ever answer the question -- I'm always much too concerned with other things of interest to me".

In contrast to this, students who are academically oriented but extrinsically interested in the course tend to be syllabus bound and in some ways 'model' students in that their essays will be in on time and the work will be done evenly over all subjects involved. These students are concerned to get to the next step in the academic ladder. University for them is the obvious progression after A levels and they have rarely thought of alternatives. They are mainly concerned with getting good grades almost for their own sake and although they will usually have chosen the course because they were good at it at school they are more interested in the academic game than in learning the subject for its own sake. The following quotes are from an extrinsically interested academic orientated student:

"Well basically I'm studying it because I did three A levels and one of them was sociology. English doesn't seem to be too good really unless you want to teach and economics - well I find the maths difficult."

"- Sociology I enjoyed, I was interested in it, I seem to get on with it so I thought I'd like to do a degree here something to do with it. And it's the only degree in human sciences so I decided to apply."

"I suppose most of my work is for assessment. I do tend to try to work - to do as best I can in essays because I mean - because they're assessed. If you try to work hard you'll get a good mark then you haven't got much pressure when it comes to the exams.

2.3 Personal orientation

This orientation is not as clear in the sample interviewed at Surrey as is vocational or academic orientation. Basically the student who is personally orientated is interested in testing or improving himself. The intrinsically interested student is concerned more with self improvement and is using the university as a means for changing himself. In some ways the university is seen as a sort of finishing school, a place where new ideas or new challenges can be used to broaden horizons and improve your ability to cope with life.

"Well - I'm doing the Human sciences course and this has three main components - philosophy, psychology and sociology. It's a very broad course and I'm not exactly attracted to the sociology bit of it but nevertheless I think it is an excellent course for someone like me who wants an enrichment of life having missed the opportunity earlier in life."

The course like, all the other sides of university life, is seen as stimulation and challenge and the student is concerned with the content of the course as far as they see it's usefulness as a vehicle for changing and developing themselves.

"Oh yes, the topics I like I will sit and read about for ever -- if I think it will be useful to me than I'll do more but some things aren't useful."

Extrinsic personal orientation is where the student is doing the course to test his own capability. He wants to find out if he is capable of a degree and if so what the highest grade possible for him would be. The student will be more concerned with grades and feedback about ability than about the content of the course. This orientation was only visible in two out of the 40 students and then was really secondary to vocational or academic orientation.

2.4 Social orientation

This again is a category that was not strong, however quite a few students appeared to have social aims which were important to the way

they went about working:

"Put it this way, I would have gone to university anyway - it was irrelevant which course."

"The outside activities that I do - (radio and film unit and sport) are very important. There is a lot to do outside and in some respects I tend to put off work because of them. If there's something to be done I'd rather do that than something else. Then I try to keep it balanced - from the point of view of university education - this side of it is just as important as the academic side, and if not - more important I suppose because you can always study in a correspondence course or something like that but you can't get this kind of social thing and development anywhere else."

Social orientation would appear to be extrinsic almost by definition, but students often have aspects of vocational or academic orientation as well as social orientation. Social orientation seems to affect the students choices about how to spend their time and may mean that the course is allocated a certain percentage of the available time and social activities the rest.

3. ORIENTATION AT THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Although the term orientation has not been specifically used in studies of Open University students in the past, Goodyear has in fact looked at this topic (Goodyear, 1975).

Goodyear interviewed small samples of O.U. students on a number of courses who were at various stages of their degree study. The aim was to find out about their attitudes and reasons for joining the O.U. with a view to understanding drop-out. The study came up with the interesting distinction between qualification and compensation as two contrasting reasons for applying to the O.U.

Qualification is where the reason is:

"Obtaining a specific qualification in order to achieve some promotion at work."

Whereas Compensation is where the students are:

"searching for something to compensate for inadequacies on one's existing life."

Students whose aim was qualification, want a degree in order to get a better job or to change their job. They usually have had contact with the academic world in previous courses etc. The compensators on the other hand feel that they have been cheated of the educational experience due to inaccurate assessment of their ability, and they feel that they are not valued by the world in the way they deserve.

Qualification and compensation can be seen to relate to the categories of vocational and personal orientations respectively identified with students at Surrey University. Goodyear also found that orientations were seen to be tied to the concerns of the students. Compensation was tied up with the need for greater counselling time and need for greater contact with O.U. personnel in general because these students often had an extreme need to succeed and tended to be anxious.

"At the moment I intend to pass, I don't think I could live with myself if I failed. If I fail I'm going to be absolutely shattered, so I've got to pass." (Student quoted in Goodyear, 1975)

The analysis of orientation helped the researchers to make sense of early dropout. They were able to describe dropout in terms of different orientations students had to studying with the O.U. and therefore their different needs from the system. One problem for the compensators, for example, is anxiety:

"This kind of highly anxious student who worries about problems which may happen is likely to have an inefficiently high drive which could cause complete breakdown and subsequent dropout.

This kind of student is likely to become over depressed at poor marks, unable to cope with the O.U. system rather than the work."
(Goodyear, 1975)

Another possible cause of early dropout was identified as those students who are compensators trying to prove that they are capable of a degree course. Goodyear suggests that for some of these students the fact that they are accepted onto the degree programme is enough to satisfy them and that the Open University should perhaps revise its admissions procedure in order to avoid these students from blocking up the system and preventing other students becoming registered as soon as they otherwise might.

A study of orientation then, can throw light on dropout and suggest possible solutions. It helps us to understand the kinds of students we are dealing with and the different reasons they have for studying with the O.U.

4. ORIENTATIONS OF D101 STUDENTS

The orientations of D101 students reported in this paper are derived from interviews before the course started, with a sample of 29 students. The sample consisted of students taking D101 as their first O.U. course and with educational qualifications of up to and including two A-levels (O.U. Level F). This sample was chosen so as to focus on students with relatively little formal educational background, that is, the students the O.U. claims to cater for. The sample was taken from students attending Milton Keynes, Aylesbury, Bedford, Luton, Hitchin and Hemel Hempstead study centres so as to obtain a "local" sample to minimise the travelling for interviews.

In the interviews, we asked a number of key questions, such as, "How did you come to be studying D101 with the O.U.?" and "What do you hope to gain by studying with the O.U.?" with probing and follow-up questions, for example, "Can you explain that?" (A full list of the questions is given in the Appendix). The interviews on orientation lasted about half an hour and were tape recorded and then transcribed in full.

The analysis of the transcripts was carried out by a process of repeated readings, to identify "significant parts" relating to orientation. A framework of categories was found to describe orientation. This framework itself does not describe the complexity of the orientations students had, nor does it describe types of students, rather it describes idealised types of orientations. The orientations that were found can be described under the three main headings of Personal, Vocational and Academic orientations.

4.1. Personal Orientation

This was the most obvious and most prevalent type of orientation found among our sample students. Two sub-groups can be identified: compensation and broadening.

Compensation is where the student feels cheated of educational opportunities in the past and is using the O.U. to prove they are capable of getting a degree. Tied in with this is the need to succeed and find your own level. This is similar to the compensation category found in the Goodyear study.

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Broadening type is where the student wishes to widen horizons and develop inter-personal skills. They describe a feeling of inadequacy and a hope that the O.U. will improve their ability to communicate with people. Unlike the compensators who want to prove that they are able, these students are aiming to become more capable people. The aim is for personal development and these students hope that the O.U. will provide them with stimulating new knowledge and through such knowledge a new lease of life.

4.1.1 Compensation

The reasons for joining the O.U. for this orientation are to do with a feeling that they have been deprived in the past and that the O.U. is going to show people that they are capable of this higher level study or else prove to themselves that they are capable.

"It's something I've always wanted to do. For personal reasons between me and my parents I didn't go to university when I should have done. I've had a hankering ever since to discover whether or not I could have done it."

"I suppose I want to prove something to myself. The one piece I have read said it was the most difficult way anybody had yet devised to get a degree and I thought - well, if I can do it at least it will prove something to me if to nobody else, and I'd like to - ."

"Basically, I just want to see if I can do it - I'm not aiming for a degree at the end that would be the bonus at the end of how ever many years. If I only get half way through the foundation course and discover - yes, it is too much for me for my brain and my time, that's fair enough. I've proved the point to myself and that's where I shall stop I guess."

For the students whose orientation was towards compensation, influence to join the O.U. had come from a feeling of competition with others:

"- I've got a neighbour who is doing an O.U. course who has done three years and I suppose, in all honesty, I felt if he can do it I don't see why I shouldn't be able to."

"I left school when I was 15 whereas all my friends you know, who are all the same sort of educational standard as me - they went to universities and things -- I feel that I've sort of wasted myself -- When I converse with them - they treat me as if I'm on a parity with them educationally and I want to prove that I am you know. The worst thing you can get is when someone says 'You're cleverer than me - and - why haven't you got - you know'".

Almost as soon as they start the course it becomes important to these students to succeed in passing the course or at least 'in staying the course'.

"It is important, yes, now I've started it is going to be quite important. If I feel that I don't suppose I had a challenge not ever probably not for me to have to do myself so it is important I have to prove, perhaps to myself that I can stick to it and do it. It is important, but just to me."

"I'd say fairly important - I feel it's going to be the only chance I've got to do this and if I drop out of it I won't get another chance, not in the foreseeable future and by then it will be too late."

One might foresee that these students might suffer anxiety about failure but initially, the worries they have are to do with the fact that it will take them a long time to complete the degree. The impression is that they would like to be able to prove whatever they need to prove as soon and as quickly as possible. This shows the extrinsic interest involved in this orientation:

"The only thing that worries me is that it's going to take so long to do. The way I've worked it out if you're only doing one credit a year it's going to take a jolly long time."

And this is underlined in their attitude to the course itself:

"I got maths O level and I decided that was as far as I could go with maths. The only other subject that I'm interested in can only be done full time - law - so apart from going full time I didn't see that I had any option. But I thought D101 would be the most relevant of the options open to me."

"I saw the local tutor counsellor and she said do Arts but I didn't want to do Arts because it was music religion history all sorts of things that I'm slightly interested in, but I didn't think I really wanted to study them. And then she made the mistake of telling me that D101 was slightly less intensive a foundation course than A101 so that's why I finally decided."

The compensation orientation is summed up by what they say they want to gain from studying with the O.U.

"Personal satisfaction, how far I can go and nothing more at all. It won't help me with my job, I don't intend to go marching off in six or seven years time clutching my B.A. and demanding a super job somewhere. I just want to do it and see what happens."

And what they say in response to the question asking about what would happen if their highest hopes were met:

"Nothing, just supreme - cat's got the cream - type smugness I imagine just to me - nothing more than that."

4.1.2 Broadening

Here the reasons for joining the O.U. are to do with a feeling of frustration that there is more to life than what one is doing at present:

"I hadn't thought about that at all but I felt that I had to do something. I thought I was going round the bend being at home and I wasn't raring to go out to get a job. I like looking after the house and the baby and that sort of thing but somehow I wanted to do something else."

"I sort of feel the need to do something outside the home because I tend to get a bit bored and I don't want to get a job. I thought that if I did an Open University course apart from providing me with an interest now it might be sort of some use later on when the children are older."

"I suppose it was waking up one morning and finding I'm 35 sort of male menopause - I can't set around here watching T.V. for the rest of my life - lets do something."

The influence or spur to join for the broadeners had come mainly from friends or family who were doing the course. This was not a competitive feeling but one of introduction:

"- it was talking to other students - I knew two. They seemed to be enthusiastic and said that it made a big difference to their lives."

"My father has been doing it for a number of years and I thought about it when he started but sort of put it off - the children were much younger than and I didn't feel I could cope with it."

"I felt so trapped - I spent all my time wandering around libraries or going round places just to see what there was open to me really - I felt there was only this. It was during the day I wanted something. And when my friends suggested this I thought Oh you know - it's for brain boxes or something because I didn't think of myself as being academically minded at all. I thought there was nothing in it that would appeal to me but she gave me some of her course units and it didn't look too intimidating."

The importance of the O.U. to these students is to do with how it changes them as people making them more able to cope with life and making them more interesting people. They see their study as purely of personal significance:

"It is important to me because it's the only thing that is me and that only I'm doing and that none of my family or friends are doing. It doesn't matter to anyone else - results wise how you get on - and I think it is purely you doing it and you getting something out of it for yourself."

Again, the choice of course is largely irrelevant and is likely to be chosen by means of elimination rather than positive choice but these students hope that the social science course will help their understanding of everyday life:

"I thought that reading through the description of the course I found that it sounded quite interesting and would sort of teach you more about life in general and the way things arise. You sort of hear a lot of things on television but you don't really understand what they are talking about sometimes and I thought that it would be sort of useful sort of course to take."

"The reasons for choosing that weren't particularly strong - I thought it might be interesting - I thought T100 would be more useful so the interest factor won in that sense."

The worries these students have tend to be about whether they are going to be 'bright enough' to do the course rather than about time for studying. As they tend to have little previous

experience of higher education this initial anxiety is to be expected, but the anxiety for these students would be eliminated as soon as they found that they were able to cope with the work.

"I mean I've got a few worries about being a bit on the thick side. I mean the usual worries about you're not being up to standard. I'm worried a bit that I might not see the subtleties of a passage or that I will be looking for things that aren't really there."

"I'm still not sure that I will be sort of capable of doing it but I sort of tried to put that out of my mind. I think you can only do your best and if it's not good enough then it's not good enough. But that is the main worry really that I won't be able to understand you know that I will be a dreadful failure - but maybe it won't be like that I don't really know what is expected of me - you don't really know what standard is expected."

The broadening aims are summed up in their responses to the question about their highest hopes and about what they expect to gain from the course:

"Well I expect to get a better insight into the way other people - think, I think one tends to be very biased - you live your own life and that is the way it is. I'm hoping that I'll be able to see things from different points of view and not be too single minded about things, I hope at the end I'll be able to converse with people more easily without getting nervous."

"I don't know - being at home it is easy just to go to coffee mornings and just to watch play school which are all right in themselves but it is not -- the end, sort of thing. I would hate to think of myself doing that this year next year and the year afterwards. And also I would like to think that it might make me more interested and more interesting really -- I want to feel that I've had an exciting day that I've learnt something today or read something today and so hopefully enrich me as a person."

"I want a mind that can think about things on a broad scale more than just the latest football results. To stretch my mind I suppose --- so I can think of things in a more analytic way and have a deeper understanding of what life's all about."

4.2 Vocational orientation

Vocational orientation was quite prevalent in the sample of students we interviewed although less so than personal orientation. Again two sub-categories appeared from studying the transcripts. For most of the students, the interest in the course was extrinsic in that qualifications were the aim rather than training.

4.2.1 Qualification

Most of the students with vocational orientations had no particular job in mind but were hoping that in some undefined way the degree would help them to get a job sometime in the future. For one student the degree was to be a beginning:

"I got nothing behind me, absolutely nothing. You know, no qualifications - I've only had odd jobs before and as soon as she (a young child) is old enough I'll have to get a job. Somebody said - 'The O.U. that's your best bet' - It's sort of an education basis - something behind me. You know, I go for a job now I haven't got a chance - no way. And I know nothing except factory work or something - that's not what I want. I'm not that bright but I'm not thick either, you know. So I want something so I can go and get a decent job."

For others the O.U. degree is seen as the start of a new career. This was mainly for women who have spent a number of years bringing up children:

"When the Open University was first set up I immediately thought that when the time came that would be for me. At the time I had one baby and I sort of thought that when they were all at school -- I would do it. Partly because I don't want to go back to a purely secretarial job - I think - it's a young persons job in some respects. I'd like something different and I don't want to do a job that will interfere with the children - so - It seemed a useful way to occupy my time."

For some it was to bring the prospect of a change of career:

"Well - originally the idea was to get a qualification for a career purposes you know, 'cos I'm a secretary at the moment and I feel I want to study to get on you know - a better career in the future - I've been thinking about it for ages really."

Some of these students hope that as well as giving them a

qualification the O.U. study will also help them to decide what it is they want to do:

"I look forward to having time to read more and get things more sorted out. And I suppose, I hope that by the end I'll have a better understanding of where I'd like to go in future - workwise."

Other students already had interesting careers that they intended to stay in and were looking to the O.U. to provide as extra help in promotion and advancement of their career generally:

"To get into this apex (top of the hierarchy) is going to be quite hard and - okay I've got two sets of professional qualifications but I need this one to go with it. Because in a lot of people's eyes, particularly management trainers and development people, a degree is everything - it proves you've done something and it - you've trained yourself to think and express yourself clearly."

For these particular students the choice of course is seen as more important:

"The technology side I've been looking at because some of it is more relevant to my job - I may do that next year or I might take a half credit because I may need to take some professional exams as well. The main advantage to me is for the job so I'll need to look for a good combination."

"Well I did economics at school and enjoyed it so I thought well my immediate reaction was - well I'm not going to try and learn something very difficult. My main object is really to climb the tree of a career and you can go up in branches - I certainly don't want to chose another tree -- I think it will be a slight change in career pattern whether or not it leads to or makes it easier to get into management - or whether it leads off at a tangent into something else financial."

For all these students the study with the O.U. is a means to an end and the interest in the course is therefore extrinsic although there may be some interest from having done some previous courses. One student however appeared to be doing the degree with the aim of understanding people in order to help him cope with his job better. This is the nearest we came to discovering any intrinsic vocational orientation:

4.2.2 Training

There was only one student who exhibited an intrinsic vocational orientation. Here the O.U. study was to help him be better at his job:

"In my work -- it appealed to me because the reaction of people is terribly important and it is not just seeing the reaction - I want to know the reason people react under various kinds of circumstances. So far, all I have is observations you know, experiences. It's important because I hope it will help me to understand people more. But I'm not going to use my qualifications at the end of the day - so that side is not important to me."

4.3 Academic orientation

This type of orientation was in evidence in so far as some students had come from previous courses in social science which had aroused their interest in the subject - this would be intrinsic interest, and others had come from these evening courses and wanted to take the next step - this would be seen as extrinsic. Extrinsic academic orientation was where the students wanted to carry on with studying:

"I wanted to do something and I've done evening classes but it wasn't really enough - I don't know - I've got through that sort of stage."

Their interest is to keep on with their education and the worries are to do with time to keep up:

"It's being able to do, you know, to keep up with it. I've got visions of something happening and being unable to keep up and falling behind, that sort of thing I worry about, having to drop out for those reasons."

These who are intrinsically interested in the course however are interested in following up their interests in particular subjects:

"It's purely interest in the subjects because if it was for a career I'd be doing a science course - it's the subject first. I'm interested in sociology which I've done a bit of before and I learnt a

lot from - about the way society works but in itself it is not enough to explain a lot of things. I know very little about political science other than recognising some of the workings of it. I want to know more about that. Economics is somewhat of a closed book to me at present yet it obviously plays a very important part on the way our society works. Understanding - you could sum it up like that."

"---gradually I've got less interested in arts and more into the sociology stuff, more aware of what they are about. I find them interesting and I'd far rather do that now than an arts course. I've been in a feminist group for 18 months now and so I need to know more about the sort of things that affect women."

Here the students are concerned with gaining knowledge about a particular subject their aims could be said to be intellectual.

5. THE COMPLEXITY OF THE ORIENTATIONS IN O.U. STUDENTS

Although we have separated out these orientations into types and sub-types they are idealised extremes and not descriptions of the types of students in the sample. In fact, any particular student's orientation will often be a complex mix of two or more of these orientational types. Some students could clearly be seen to be mainly personally orientated but many of these had evidence of other vocational or academic orientations. In the sample as a whole all the students showed some signs of personal orientation. About half showed some vocational orientation and about a third had aspects of academic orientation.

A breakdown of how the sample could be analysed quantitatively in terms of orientation is as follows. But even this does not do justice to the complexity of any individual student's orientation.

Exclusively personal orientation	4
Mainly personal secondary vocational	10
Mainly personal secondary academic	6
Exclusively vocationally orientated	2
Mainly vocational secondary personal	4
Mainly academic secondary personal	3
	29

There were 14 students in the sample who had both personal and vocational orientations. Those whose personal orientation were the most important tended to make a distinction between long and short term aims. To illustrate these joint orientations and the complexity of individual students' orientations, here are examples of students who are primarily personally orientated although there are aspects of vocational orientation.

"Well I hope to stop myself from turning into a complete cabbage - and to sort of well - to widen my views on life and the problems and eventually I hope to get a degree and possibly that will help me to get a job one day which I would like to do. But I think that that is very much a secondary consideration."

I suppose in the long term I haven't really got any qualifications for a particular job and I would like to think that in the long term, by the time I finish, it will be time for me to go and get a job. And assuming everything goes well, then I'd like to go into something like social work possibly or something like that. So job prospects are in the long term but I am not really doing it for that end, but for the means rather than the end really."

Both these quotes show clearly the personal aims and the background or secondary vocational aims that these students have. We can expect that both these aims will affect the students approach to the course and a detailed description of the orientation including the relative strength of these aims should help us to understand the particular students approach.

Similarly, where a student shows signs of having both personal and academic orientations, both parts of the orientation will affect the student's relationship with the course. A student who is personally orientated but also academically orientated might be interested in personal development, but more in terms of the ideas to be explored in the subject than in becoming more capable in a general way:

"I'm interested in man in society and I realise how narrow a view I have about the way society works, about what other people feel and do and why they do these things and I sort of got a bit from doing the A level last year and I hope that I get an awful lot more from doing D101 this year."

"I suppose I want to be an intelligent stimulating person (laughs) - I just hope that at the end of it I shall have a sort of broader outlook and also have more knowledge of things. I think that that is quite important, the idea of being able to know more than I do now because often I think

about questions and I don't really know an awful lot about the particular subjects that might be, if a discussion comes up or maybe some social problem or something. I don't really know enough or I feel I don't know enough, whether I will at the end I don't really know - I hope I will."

In these two quotes one cannot distinguish clearly between the two orientations - they seem to mingle together as one orientation, and yet a description of the 'ideal' types of orientation helps to unravel the students particular individual orientation and make the implications more apparent.

6. THE RELATIONSHIP OF O.U. STUDENTS ORIENTATION TO CONVENTIONAL STUDENTS ORIENTATION

As only two small scale studies will be compared here it is important to point out that the comparison is a tentative one, nevertheless there are quite striking differences between the O.U. students and students at Surrey University.

The most striking difference is the emphasis on personal orientation in the O.U. students compared with that of the Surrey students. This is made more interesting by the fact that the students in the sample at Surrey University who showed personal orientation were nearly all mature students, i.e., over 26 years old. It may be that personal orientation is a feature of mature students rather than just O.U. students.

For O.U. students the emphasis on personal orientation was coupled with less emphasis on academic orientation. In contrast, academic orientation was the main feature of students' orientation at Surrey, especially those taking the Philosophy, Psychology and Sociology course.

In fact many of the O.U. students in our sample had chosen D101 with little knowledge of the course content, or as a student put it "chosen the course in the dark".

One would expect that choosing a course "in the dark" or by way of elimination might make the O.U. student much more susceptible to bad or at least uninformed choices and one result of this may be early dropout - if for example students believe the Social Science course to be about

social work they will be confused and perhaps unhappy about the economics etc. involved in D101. There is some evidence in our study to suggest that this is the case with a minority of students and that the first block of the course which looks at 'social problems' tends to confirm this view so that the second Block - 'Population Resources and Technology' comes as a bit of a shock. The isolation of many O.U. students particularly between acceptance and the start of the course must exacerbate this problem and the new early advisory scheme may be very necessary from this point of view.

The vocational orientation found in the sample of D101 students has a different emphasis from that found in the study of Surrey University students. For the O.U. students, the vocational orientation was non-specific, in that students had a rather vague hope that a degree would help them getting a job in the future. (The sample of D101 students in the present study excludes students with teacher training diplomas, who are likely to want an O.U. degree specifically for career progression.) At Surrey, however, most of the Hotel and Catering students and many Philosophy, Psychology & Sociology students, who had vocational orientations, knew what job they were aiming for.

Many O.U. students on the other hand did not know definitely that they would need or want a job. For many of the women, an O.U. degree was seen as the first step towards a new career, but even so they were not definite about going back to work.

There was also some doubt, certainly in the students' minds, as to the worth of an O.U. degree in the world of work. Whereas the Surrey students believe that their degree will give them a certain status in the search for employment, the O.U. students are by no means convinced of this. Even if the O.U. is actually valued equally by employers, the students themselves were not always confident of this.

Another difference between the students at Surrey and the D101 students was the intrinsic and extrinsic interest in the courses. This is tied in with the difference in types of orientations shown in the two studies, and also tied in with the fact that the O.U. students had little recent background in formal education. For many of the O.U. students the interest in the course was intrinsic in the sense that they wanted to become more

knowledgeable or more capable due to the course but it was intrinsic in studying rather than in the subject itself. For most of these students, the subject was a complete unknown and even irrelevant. For the Surrey students however, the choice of course was usually more important and if they were doing the course for its own sake it was because they were interested in or expected to be able to use the particular subjects they were studying.

7. HOW ARE ORIENTATIONS GOING TO AFFECT WHAT STUDENTS DO WITH THE COURSE AND HOW THEY APPROACH STUDYING?

So far, from the analysis of orientation on its own we have a collection of orientational types and some implications about the concerns and focuses of attention for students with different orientations. The suggestion is that students with different orientations will want different things out of a particular course and will attach not just more or less, but different importance to them. In other words the orientation of O.U. students varies in quality and not just in quantity. Students are not merely more or less interested (or motivated) in a course, they actually have quite different aims and expectations of how the course will affect them and their lives. This very fact of different kinds of orientation should alert us to the dangers of tools of analysis which do not take such differences into account but rather assume that students are purely wanting to learn 'the course'.

For example, recently there has been some debate in the O.U. about the use of 'helpfulness ratings' as indicators of the success of particular teaching devices, sections of units, television programmes and so on. To an extraordinary extent the 'effectiveness' of specific aspects of course design in the O.U. are evaluated in terms of such helpfulness ratings. However, the debate about the use of these ratings revolved almost exclusively around statistical issues, around measurement and scaling procedures etc. There seemed to be little questioning of what a helpfulness rating indicated - what it meant.

There appeared to be a widespread assumption that students are concerned with exactly the same things as each other and that this is the same as the concerns of course teams. It is assumed moreover, that students'

helpfulness ratings indicated exactly what course teams were concerned about, i.e. largely the learning of specific subject matter. These assumptions seem quite incorrect. What evidence we do have suggests that many students are concerned, not merely with the subject matter, let alone the same aspects of the subject matter as the course team are concerned about. Instead, students may be concerned about how a particular point relates to their own idiosyncratic interest, or how it will help them become more interesting, by broadening them for example, and they may not even be interested in learning the content at all but merely in being able to express themselves better.

What a student is indicating by a helpfulness rating is likely to be largely framed by the student's own concerns. If the student is orientated towards personal development and interpersonal communication skills, then a helpfulness rating of a tutorial is unlikely to indicate much about the mastery of specific subject matter in the tutorial, but rather whether the tutorial offered a facilitative environment for personal growth and talking with others. Similarly for a vocationally orientated student it might indicate whether the subject discussed was relevant or not to a future career etc.

This study shows that an academic orientation - a primary concern for the subject matter - is extremely rare in our sample of new social science students. This might suggest that helpfulness ratings may be pretty unhelpful!

Students' orientations to studying are likely to be directly linked to how they approach a particular learning task. For example, students with a personal orientation and the aims of "broadening", describe how they expect O.U. studying to lead to personal change and development. This orientation implies an openness to change and that in studying, the course content will be related to personal experience. This orientation and approach to study has similarities with Rogers'(1969) concept of personally meaningful learning.

In contrast, students whose aim in studying with the O.U. is towards compensation express very different concerns about their O.U. work. These students are concerned to prove their capabilities to themselves and their friends and it is very important to them to succeed in passing the course. It seems that these students who appear to be assessment conscious, will

approach studying very differently from students whose aims are personal change and development

These two examples show how orientation can be related to approach to study. The two main distinctions in approach to study of a meaning orientation and a reproducing orientation have been identified for both O.U. and conventional university students, (Morgan, Gibbs & Taylor, 1980b). The two personal orientations of broadening and compensation seems to be linked to a meaning orientation and a reproducing orientation for approach to studying, respectively.

A study of orientation, besides giving us an understanding of the diversity of aims and purposes students have in their O.U. studies, forms a basis for understanding how students go about learning and why they adopt particular approaches.

8. REFERENCES

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2. APPENDIX

list of key questions used in the interview about orientation:

Can you tell me something about how you came to be studying with the Open University?

What do you feel about it now that the course is almost beginning?

What do you hope to gain from studying with the O.U.?

What about D101, what do you hope to gain from that particular course?

How important would you say it is to you?

If the O.U. study fulfilled your highest hopes - what would it be like, what would happen?

What do you expect to learn from the course?

Many probing questions or follow up questions were used in order to explore avenues raised by the students in response to these key questions and because of this the questions were not always asked in the above order. The usual time for this part of the interview was around half to three quarters of an hour

STUDY METHODS GROUP REPORTS

- Report No. 1 "The Work of the Study Methods Group".
- Report No. 2 "A Review of the Research of Ference Marton and the Goteborg Group".
- Report No. 3 "The Value of the Lecture: Looking from the Inside".
- Report No. 4 "Students' Approaches to Studying the Social Science and Technology Foundation Courses: Preliminary Studies".
- Report No. 5 "Understanding Why Students Don't Learn".
- Report No. 6 "An Example of the Quality of Students' Understanding: Initial Conceptions of Psychology".
- Report No. 7 "The Orientations of Students Studying the Social Science Foundation Course".